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ABSTRACT

Directed toward the question of how parents and 15-year-old adolescents cope with the demands of social change occurring during unification in Germany, the comparative investigation of 40 families each in East and West Germany examines macro-social conditions of family relationships and rightist attitudes among German adolescents and adults. The results indicate that East German families are more subject to social change than West German families, but Eastern and Western German families show little differences in family relationships and rightist attitudes. Aspects of perceived social change affects family relationships although not dramatically, and findings also show that financial strain as perceived by parents correlated positively with anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes, whereas other aspects of social change are more distant from the immediate living situation and less influential. Anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes for East German adolescents seem to be more different from each other (r=.36) than for West German adolescents (r=.60). Implications from the study are that unification, though politically favored by most Germans, puts a burden on families and the East German families more so than West German families, and deteriorating economic situations weaken family ties and possibly increase anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes. (CK)

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FAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS FACING SOCIAL CHANGE AFTER THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY

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FAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS FACING SOCIAL CHANGE AFTER THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY[1]

March 7, 1994

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There is hardly any precedent of social change taking place within a whole society at a similarly rapid pace without a violent revolution than the unification of Germany in 1990. The comparative investigation of 40 families each in East and West Germany to be presented is directed toward the question of how parents and 15-year-old adolescents cope with the demands of social change taking place in their country. According to the literature (Ge et al., 1992), economic hardship influences individual development of the family members and the way family members view their relationships. Unification in Germany provides a unique case to study also effects of social variables changing at different pace.

Since the unification between East and West Germany on July, 2nd 1990 in which most aspects of the economic, legal, financial, cultural system of West Germany became law also in East Germany, families in the East face a large array of new demands which partly make their lives more comfortable (freedom and availability of consumer goods), partly require totally new coping strategies. Especially, matters of family income and money spending, of social welfare, of schooling, and of

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professional choice have to be dealt with in new ways. This change is augmented by a high unemployment rate in the East and an East-West unbalance in family income (40% higher in the West in 1993). A sudden 50% drop of birth rates in the East after unification shows how families respond to new environmental demands. Families with teenage children might be at special risk as in this phase of family career they have to cope with special developmental demands (Duvall & Miller, 1984).

Following the theory of individuation (Smollar & Youniss, 1989), adolescents while trying to maintain a positive relationship with their parents try to make their own decisions and to resist parental control intentions. One well-documented indication is the rise of parent-children conflict during this stage (Montemayor, 1983). Thus, in some Eastern families relationships may suffer as a reaction to aspects of social change, while members of other families might strengthen their ties.

In West Germany, such a rapid change has not taken place. Though, also here as well as in other industrialized countries global shifts in society, such as individualization and technological change, take place. Moreover, in both parts of Germany a marked recession (4.8% inflation in 1992) begins to put strain also on West German families. Violent attacks of a minority of young people on foreign asylum seekers and local elections in 1993 with about 8% of the adults voting in favor of rightist parties contributed to doubts concerning Germany's future. In this study, correlations between social change and family and individual characteristics in West German families are investigated.

The study started out in Fall 1992 to examine how East and West German families react to the rapid changes of their society. One purpose of the study is to replicate the findings of Elder, Conger and colleagues on the relationship between economic loss and individual and family development. While their research has concentrated on the consequences of economic loss on family relationships and individual characteristcs like anger and depression, however, changes in political attitudes as a function of economic stress has not been in focus recently. Furthermore, other aspects of social change like feelings of anomia and its consequences for individual and family development have not gained much attention in research on adolescent development. Very aware of other possible explanations for the development of anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes, especially in Germany, we assume that anti-foreigner and anti-democratic attitudes of German adolescents and their parents are part of a more complex dysfunctional adaptational response to an increasing feeling of insecurity about the future individual and societal development. These assumptions are in line with considerations of sociologists stating that the modernization processes in industrialized countries foster the loss of orientation in a rapidly changing world which, consequently, results in the demand for a simpler structure of society. This simpler structure is the deceptive promise provided by a mono-cultural authoritarian society. This theory offers a broader framework for the understanding of anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes which can be observed in most of the European countries today.

Figure 1 displays the central lines of the investigation. Starting point is the comparison East/West. Social change as the independent variable has to be studied in more detail. Social change should influence the way families interact and how they perceive their relationships. It should have a direct and indirect impact also on the characteristics of the individual family members, especially of the children. The impact of social change on family relations and individual characteristics is supposed to be moderated by individual and family resources and coping strategies.

Figure 1

The following hypotheses guided our analyses:

(1) Because of the former separation of Germany into two countries with rather different political and educational systems, the question is whether there are differences between East and West German families.

(2) The more social change people perceive the more family relations are stressed.

(3) The more social change people perceive the more they agree with anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes.

(4) The effect of social change to anti-foreigner attitudes is buffered by close family ties.

Method

Subjects

The comparison involves 83 families with 15 year old adolescents each in Leipzig (44) and Mannheim (39), two cities

in East and West Germany with a population of 300,000 to 500,000 inhabitants (Tables 1a & 1b). The adolescents (46% female in Leipzig; 59% female in Mannheim) attended the 9th grade of middle track schools leading them to apprenticeship after 10th grade. The educational and job situation of the parents in the East Germany sample was above the average.

Table 1a: Sample characteristics

	EAST	WEST
n	44	39
Gender of Child (% Female)	47.6	59.0
Age of Child	15.2 Yrs	15.4 Yrs
Number of Sibs	1.0	1.0
Biological Father	74.4%	97.4%
Biological Mother	100%	100%
Age Father	40.3	44.6
Age Mother	39.0	40.9
Education Father		
8th Grade/Haupt	10.3%	57.9%
10th Grade/Real	61.5%	26.3%
Abitur	28.2%	15.8%
Education Mother		
8th Grade/Haupt	11.9%	56.4%
10th Grade/Real	59.5%	33.3%
Abitur	29.6%	10.2%

Table 1b: Sample characteristics, Employment

		EAST	WEST
Job Father			
	Full-time	87.2%	97.4%
	Unemployed	0	0
	"Hidden" Unemployed	12.8%	0
	Retired	0	2.6%
Job Mother			
	Full-time	71.4%	20.5%
	Part-time	4.8%	35.9%
	Unemployed	7.1%	0
	"Hidden" Unemployed	11.9%	2.6%
	Retired	0	0
Family Income		3733 DM	4925 DM

Variables

As part of more extensive assessments, the adolescents and their parents completed questionnaires addressing various aspects of individual and familial development as well as the familial economic situation and perceptions of societal changes. For the present analyses, the following variables were included:

Social change 1: Changes in financial resources of the families (Purchasing Power)

Parents had to indicate how much their economic situation changed compared to five years ago with respect to a variety of goods. Father and mother separately responded to the following question with respect to ten different goods. "Compared to five years ago, has it become easier or more difficult to spend money on: ....." Factor analyses revealed two independent factors: PURCHASING POWER I (clothes, travels, car, groceries, hosting guests, stereo/VCR/etc., refrigerator/washing machine/etc.) with high Cronbachs Alphas in both samples (EAST: .93; WEST: .89) and PURCHASING POWER II (Rent, leisure/cultural activities, child care - alphas: EAST: .88; WEST: .74). Response categories varied from 1 = much easier to 5 = very difficult, 3 indicated no change. For the present analyses responses from both parents were combined.

Social change 2: Perceived changes on societal level

To measure the perception of microsocial change, each subject (mother, father and adolescent) had to indicate in a variety of aspects to what extent they had experienced change in the last

five years (e.g. "moral principles are of little significance for people"). After factor analyses, two dimensions seem to represent central concerns of the people in East and West: "Uncertainty of life situation" and "Decline of the social welfare system".

UNCERTAINTY OF THE LIFE-SITUATION

This scale consists of six statements addressing anomic aspects of society, like (compared to five years ago) increasing complexity, increasing criminality, increasing differences in income between people etc. Alphas are reasonably high in both samples (Parents: WEST: .80; EAST: .77; Adolescents: WEST: .75; EAST: .91). Response categories varied from 1 = has become much less to 5 = has become much more, 3 indicated no change.

DECLINE OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM

This scale consists of four items addressing the decline of financial and social security of families and old people as well as opportunities for women and young people in the country (compared to five years ago). Alphas were just acceptable (Alphas: Parents: WEST: .54; EAST: .56; Adolescents: WEST: .52; EAST: .64).

Family Relationships

The construct of individuation was measured by using a questionnaire consisting of two scales representing the tendencies of CONTROL and CONNECTEDNESS for parents and SEPARATENESS and CONNECTEDNESS for adolescents as it was conceptualized by researchers such as Youniss and Smollar (1989), Grotevant and Cooper (1986) and Steinberg and Silverberg (1986). For parents, example items are "It is

important for me that my child is obedient" (control), and "My child and I are often just talking with each other" (connectedness).

To measure the construct of MARITAL CONFLICT a scale developed by Hahlweg (1979) was used (e.g. "He/she starts arguments because of trivial things").

For family climate, two variables were used: HARMONY "If we have differences of opinion we do not argue", CLOSENESS "Often we all feel like strangers in our family". They stem from a questionnaire originally developed by Skinner, Steinhauer & Santa Barbara (1983), translated by Kreppner (FAM 3).

Anti-Foreigner attitudes

In the area of individual development the main interest was directed toward the construct of Ethnocentrism.

The scale consists of four items with slogans, which are popular among certain groups of people today. (e.g., "There are too many foreigners in Germany.", "Foreigners occupy jobs which should be reserved for Germans."). Alphas were reasonable high apart from East German mothers. (Alphas: Mothers: WEST: .80; EAST: .54; Fathers: West: .79; East: .83; Adolescents: WEST: .81; EAST: .70).

Anti-democratic attitudes

This scale consists of eight items addressing the superiority of the Germans above other people in some virtues as well as the longing for authoritarian rule (e.g.,"Germans have some virtues like diligence, faithfulness, and sense of duty other people do not have."). Alphas were acceptable (Alphas: Mothers:

WEST: .65; EAST: .51; Fathers: West: .59; East: .72;

Adolescents: WEST: .68; EAST: .70).

Results

The main results can be grouped in four parts.

(a) Differences between East and West families

First, we examined whether families in East and West Germany perceived change during the past five years.

Table 2: Social change, anti-foreigner and anti-democratic attitudes, East and West German adults and adolescents (Means).

	MEANS					
	EAST			WEST		
	Mothers	Fathers	Youth	Mothers	Fathers	Youth
PURCHAS POW II	2.38	----		3.05***		----
PURCHAS POW II ^	3.73	----		2.94***		----
UNCERTAINTY	4.29	4.27	4.24	3.90*[a]	3.79**	3.89***
DECLINE	3.79	3.66	3.05	2.86***	2.85***	2.61***
CONNECTEDNESS	3.49	3.25	3.06	3.51	3.31	3.14
CONTROL/SEP	3.28	3.24	2.73	3.06**	2.99**	2.88
MARITAL CONFL	1.52	1.61	----	1.59	1.68	----
HARMONY	3.03	3.07	2.73	3.06	3.18	2.83
CLOSENESS	3.58	3.51	3.39	3.55	3.55	3.44
ANTI-FOREIGNER	2.26	2.24	2.42	2.24	2.28	2.22
ANTI-DEMOCRATIC	2.32	2.40	2.32	2.13	2.11**	2.15

[a] The indication of significance results from pairwise comparisons (t-tests) between mothers (fathers, adolescents) from East and West Germany.

Table 2 shows that they differ significantly: Families in the East perceive increasing financial strain, when it comes to expenses for rent, while Western families on average perceive no change in this respect. Eastern Families perceive more uncertainty of the life situation and more decline of the welfare system than those from West Germany. When expenses for everyday goods, such as food or clothing, are concerned, the financial situation for East German families has become better, while it did not change for West German families.

There were hardly any differences in measures of family relationships. Only, mothers and fathers in the East claimed to exert significantly more control over the behavior of their children than their counterparts in the West.

Looking at anti-foreigner and anti-democratic attitudes, surprisingly rather no differences between Eastern and Western adults and adolescents can be seen, in spite of the different perception of social change. One exception are East German fathers, who on average show stronger anti-democratic attitudes compared to West German fathers.

(b) Relationships between social change and family relations

The results so far are hardly of any explanatory power. More insight might be gained when the correlations between life situation variables and family relationships are scrutinized (Tables 3 and 4). East-West turned out to be a strong moderator variable, as the correlations were markedly different when calculated separately for the two samples. Fathers and mothers displayed different correlation patterns too. In Mannheim (West Germany), mothers reported less marital conflict the more they suffered under economic deprivation and the more they experienced life as increasingly uncertain. Leipzig (East Germany) mothers seemed to react differently. The more financial restrictions they felt the less harmony and closeness in their family life they reported. This, however, is true only if they felt a shortage concerning paying the rent and child care. It did not hold when money for consumer goods is scarce. They may get nervous only when rents get too high and when

child care is too expensive, which otherwise would allow to earn a second income.

Table 3: Intercorrelations between social change and family relationships, mothers's perspective

		CON	CTR	M-CO	HARM	CLOSE
WEST						
	UNCERTAINTY	.00	.21	-.41**	.17	.00
	DECLINE	.13	-.20	.19	-.27+	-.04
	PURCH POW I	-.04	.07	-.22+	.09	.23+
	PURCH POW II	-.23+	.02	-.39**	.04	-.08
EAST						
	UNCERTAINTY	.12	-.10	.13	-.17	-.10
	DECLINE	.19	.05	.08	-.11	.05
	PURCH POW I	-.09	-.23+	-.07	.18	-.12
	PURCH POW II	-.34*	.25+	.07	-.32*	-.29*

Table 4: Intercorrelations between social change and family relationships, father's perspective

		CON	CTR	M-CO	HARM	CLOSE
WEST						
	UNCERTAINTY	.16	.09	-.20	.02	.37*
	DECLINE	-.33*	-.31*	.03	-.20	-.28*
	PURCH POW II	.19	.31*	.28*	-.04	.10
	PURCH POW II	.10	.23+	.15ns	-.02	.03
	JOB INSECURE	-.16	-.31*	-.17	.23+	-.04
EAST						
	UNCERTAINTY	-.23+	.04	.03	-.04	-.22+
	DECLINE	-.03	-.05	.21+	-.25+	-.16
	PURCH POW I	-.04	-.06	.29*	-.15	-.14
	PURCH POW II	-.06	.14	.32*	-.25+	-.28*
	JOB INSECURE	-.13	.16	.39**	-.45**	-.42**

For western fathers (Table 4), the picture is more differentiated since different indicators of life situations have differential impact on measures of family relationships. Job insecurity and the perception of decline of the social system is correlated with lower connectedness and lower control over the child. However, those who experienced heavier losses in purchasing power reported higher control over their children

and more marital conflict. This may be due to the differential perception of social change. Western fathers, for instance, tended to perceive their economic deprivation as more or less unrelated to macrosocial changes. For eastern fathers the loss in purchasing power for consumer goods is related to what they perceive as changes in the society. When they considered their income as low and their jobs as insecure they reported more marital conflict, less harmony and less closeness in their families. They displayed the same pattern as their wives but to a markedly greater degree.

Table 5: Intercorrelations between social change and family relationships, Child's perspective

	CON	SEP	HARM	CLOSE
WEST				
UNCERTAINTY	-.11	-.30*	-.20	-.19
DECLINE	-.12	.16	.27+	.35*
EAST				
UNCERTAINTY	.19	-.24+	.16	.29*
DECLINE	-.12	.07	-.04	-.33*

Table 5 shows the relationships between social change as perceived by the adolescents and their view on the family processes. It seems as if adolescents have a less separeted relationship to their parents the more uncertain they see the social circumstances. And the perception of social decline is correlated with a better family climate in the West but with lowered closeness in the East.

(c) Correlations between perceptions of social change and anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes

Table 6: Social change, anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes. Bivariate correlations.

	PURCH POW I	PURCH POW II	UNCERTAIN	DECLINE
ANTI-FOREIGNER				
EAST -mothers	.11	.20+	-.15	-.08
EAST -fathers	.12	.40**	.24+	-.02
EAST -adolescents	19	.18	.01	-.12
WEST -mothers	.40**	.28*	-.24+	.18
WEST -fathers	.40**	.34*	-.23+	-.22+
WEST -adolescents	.44**	.51**	.48**	-.17
ANTI-DEMOCRATIC				
East mothers	.18	.19	-.12	-.08
East fathers	.29*	.48***	.34*	.08
East adolescents	-.04	.29*	.07	-.28*
West mothers	.26+	.29*	-.06	.09
West fathers	.13	.13	.03	-.06
West adolescents	.09	.33*	. 25+	-.36*

Table 6 shows that in East and West German families increasing financial strain as perceived by parents is positively correlated with anti-foreigner and anti-democratic attitudes among parents and adolescents. When looking at the correlations more carefully, one can see that adolescents in East and West react somewhat differently to financial strain regarding their attitudes towards foreigners: West German adolescents tend to show a clearer anti-foreigner reaction facing less available money in the familiy budget. Concerning anti-democratic attitudes, the adolescents in East and West show the same moderate correlations.

When the impact of the other facets of social change on rightist attitudes are concerned, namely the feelings of uncertainty and perceiving the decline of the welfare system, different patterns show up. Only among East German fathers and West German adolescents more uncertainty goes along with more anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes. On the contrary,

perceiving the welfare system as declining seems to go along with more liberal attitudes, especially among adolescents.

(d) Social change and family relationships as predictors of anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes.

Multiple regression analyses were run to track the combined effect of financial restrictions and family measures as seen by the adolescents upon the dependent variables. In both samples, adolescent's anti-foreigner attitudes are higher the lower they see their connectedness with parents. But since in the West sample the two independet measures are correlated their is no separate effect of Connectedness on anti-foreigner attitudes. In the East sample, Connectedness is the most powerful predictor of anti-foreigner attitudes ($r=-.43$, $p<.01$). And Closeness of family members acts as a buffer for the negative effects of financial strains on anti-foreigner attitudes.

Conclusions

The purpose of the paper was to examine macro-social conditions of family relationships and rightist attitudes among German adolescents and adults. First, the results showed that East German families are more subject to social change than West German families, but Eastern and Western families show little differences in family relationships and rightist attitudes. Only Eastern fathers tended to be more anti-democratic and both, Eastern mothers and fathers, reported to exert more control over their children.

Secondly, family relationships are affected by aspects of perceived social change, albeit not dramatically. Financial loss and job insecurity seem to be the most potent predictors

of alterations in the marital and parent-child-relationship, especially when rent and child care are in jeopardy. The picture is not uniform between mothers, fathers in East and West. But at this moment, the sample size is too small to draw a coherent interpretation.

Thirdly, we found that especially financial strain as perceived by the parents correlates positively with anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes, whereas other aspects of social change being more distant from the immediate living-situation are less influential. Although the direction of the relationships is similar in the East and West German subsamples, the size of the effect on anti-foreigner attitudes is bigger in West German mothers and adolescents. When looking at anti-democratic attitudes, similar effects of financial strains in East and West German adolescents are found, but the impact of parents´ attitudes is different in both subsamples. In West Germany mothers´ attitudes are rather influential, but not in East Germany. In general, only part of the impact of financial strain on adolescents´ rightist attitudes is mediated by their parents´ attitudes, what points to additional sources of influence on adolescents actual political attitudes.

Looking more closely on the two aspects of rightist attitudes in focus, it seems that one has to differentiate their meaning for adolescents at least in East Germany. Anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes for East German adolescents seem to be more different from each other ($r = .36^{*}$) than for West German adolescents ($r = .60^{***}$) and, therefore, differentially related to experiences of financial strain. Some researchers see this greater differentiation in

East German adolescents as a result of the different aims of political education during the years of separation of Germany. It also could be due to a different exposure to foreigners (in Leipzig, East Germany, only about 5% of the populations are foreigners, whereas in Mannheim, West Germany, 17% are foreigners) that makes West German adolescents more likely to develop anti-foreigner attitudes when facing financial strain or uncertainty of their life-situation.

In line with the modernization theory cited in the beginning of this paper, we found that West German adolescents react to more anomic feelings with anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes. This reaction could not be observed among East German adolescents. This finding could serve as a hint that Western theories are not easily applicable for Eastern adolescents.

Family variables too, can affect anti-foreigner attitudes of adolescents. Especially in the East, this predictor is more potent than financial strain. In the West, high family ties my lower the risks exerted from financial strains. Since many family relations suffer in accordance with financial strain, this variable can be regarded as a transmittor variable.

It can be concluded that unification though politically favored by most Germans, puts a burden on families as (more so in East than in West Germany) it is connected with a deterioration of the daily life, with more insecure future perspectives. Strategies to cope with new demands and tasks are developed rapidly, but as the economic situation in both parts of the country seems to deteriorate further and womens chances to enter the labor force are still getting worse, it is to be

expected that family ties will get weaker. And anti-democratic and anti-foreigner attitudes of adolescents and their parents in East and West Germany may increase.

Nevertheless, interpreting the findings, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of the study. So far, we are referring to a considerably small sample which is mainly urban and clearly middle-class. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the analyses does not allow to test directions of effects. Assessed perceptions of change could easily be subject to influences by other attitudes and personality characteristics. Instances of unexpected negative correlations between, e.g., perceptions of decline of the welfare system and anti-democratic attitudes are suggestive of this interpretation. By now, a second wave of data has been collected as well as an additional sample which is larger and more heterogeneous in terms of SES. Thus, it will be possible to answer some open questions in the future.

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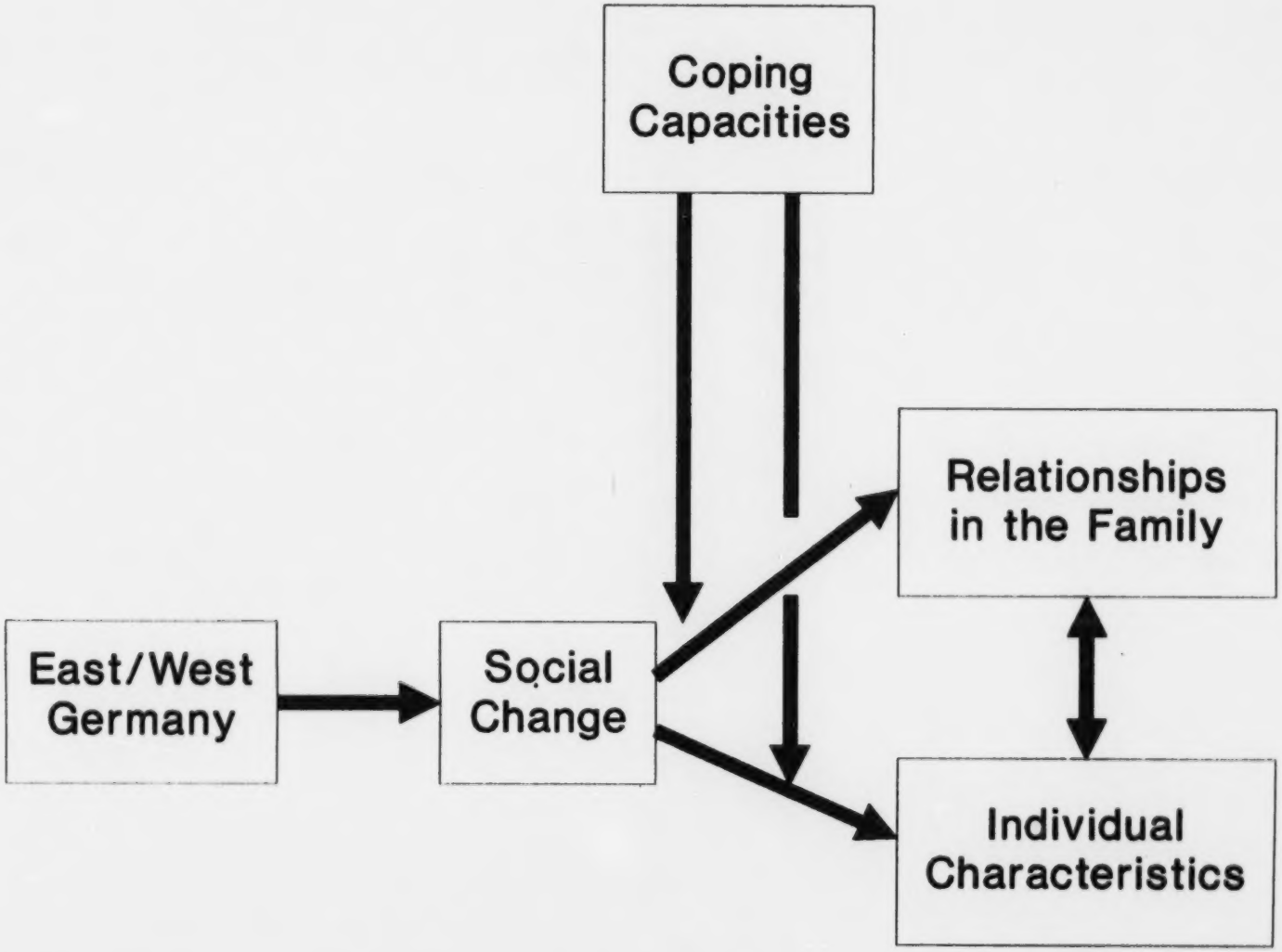

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figure 1